DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 478 436 CE 085 089

AUTHOR	Mojab, Shahrzad; Wall, Naomi Binder; McDonald, Susan
TITLE	Collaborative Learning for Change. NALL Working Paper.
INSTITUTION	Ontario Inst. for Studies in Education, Toronto. New Approaches to Lifelong Learning.
SPONS AGENCY	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Ottawa (Ontario).
REPORT NO	No-51
PUB DATE	2002-02-00
NOTE	21p.; Research conducted as part of the Violence, Rights, and Law: Informal Learning Experiences of Immigrant Women project, funded by New Approaches to Lifelong Learning and the Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS).
AVAILABLE FROM	For full text: http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/depts/sese/csew/nall/res/51ShahzadMoj ah.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adult Learning; *Adult Students; Citizen Participation; Community Cooperation; *Consciousness Raising; Developed Nations; Empowerment; Experiential Learning; Family Violence; *Females; Foreign Countries; *Group Activities; Group Dynamics; *Leadership Training; Learning Strategies; Racial Discrimination; Social Change; Student Centered Curriculum; Teaching Guides; *Womens Education
IDENTIFIERS	Canada; *Marginalized Groups

ABSTRACT

This guide is designed as a community-based resource for women who are interested in developing leadership skills in group facilitation, community building, and community action. It provides an integrated feminist anti-oppression learning framework that links social justice issues and the questions of race, gender, class, and all other forms of marginalization to the question of how women learn. The guide includes six workshops that emphasize the connections between learning and action that allow women to develop their consciousness of the actions required to bring about necessary change in their lives as women. Introductory materials discuss the research that lead to this guide and suggestions for conducting the workshops, including useful tools for building group processes. Each session outline consists of some or all of these components: check-in, debriefing, informational materials, warm-up exercise, exercises, and closure. Sessions are (1) women's experiences are the basis of learning; (2) facilitating group processes; (3) learning strategies (4) gender bias in the law; (5) funding; and (6) outreach and organizing. (YLB)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 478 436

NALL Working Paper # 51 - 2002

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING FOR CHANGE

Shahrzad Mojab, Naomi Binder Wall and Susan McDonald

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D.W. Livingstone

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

This project is based on the result of the research conducted by
Dr. Shahrzad Mojab and Dr. Susan McDonald
for the *New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL):*
Violence, Rights, and Law: Informal Learning Experiences of Immigrant Women

NALL the research network for New Approaches to Lifelong Learning

Le Réseau de recherche sur les nouvelles approches de l'éducation permanente

February 2002

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CE085089

Acknowledgments

Our Research Objectives

An Integrated Feminist Anti-Oppression Learning Framework

Workshops

Session One: *Women's Experiences Are the Basis for Learning*
Starting from Women's Experiences
Using a Feminist Framework
Understanding Commonality & Difference
Process for Gathering Experiences
Tools and Exercises

Session Two: Facilitating Group Process
Working with Group Dynamics
Cooperative Problem-Solving Model

Session Three: Learning Strategies
Creating Effective Learning Opportunities

Session Four: Gender Bias in the Law

Session Five: Funding

Session Six: Outreach and Organizing

APPENDIX 1
Canadian Immigration and Refugee Protection Act Sponsorship Program

Acknowledgments

There are a great many people who contributed to developing and implementing this project. During the initial research phase, the staff of the Women's Program at the Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples, Ruth Lara, Maria Rosa Maggi, and Viviana Fleming, provided critical feedback and assistance.

The first participants in this project were Gilda Gomez, Katty Salinas, Rita Egas, and Rezvan Saeedpour. Their constructive feedback helped to shape the curriculum in the early days and make it truly responsive to their learning needs. Their enthusiasm for the project also helped to move it forward.

Recognition must go to the Facilitator Training Program at the Women's Counselling Referral and Education Centre which provided a model and some materials for the project. As well, thanks must go to METRAC B The Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children B and the Victim Services Program of Toronto, both of which met with the participants the first summer the project was offered.

Thanks must also go to our funders B the New Approaches to Lifelong Learning Network (NALL) and the Joint Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) B for supporting the project over the past three years.

Our Research Objectives

The purpose of the research was to contribute to our understanding of the impact of violence on immigrant women's learning. One of the main objectives of the study was to learn about the relationship between patriarchal, political, social, and economic power structures of violence and the experience of immigrant women's learning in the diaspora. The main question that guided our research was: How do women who have experienced violence either in domestic or war situations best learn about their rights, the law, and strategies for resistance? What are the features of these types of learning?

We used a feminist-anti-racist participatory methodology so women could help to define their learning process and legal needs, and participate in the design and implementation of alternative. This method enabled researcher to establish a relationship of trust and respect with the participants. We drew on feminist research methodology to facilitate the women's participation. Feminist methodology begins with embodied people and their location in social space. We used feminist research methods such as oral history and testimony to collect different types of data; multiple sources of information lead to better qualitative studies as compared to those based on a single source (Green-Powell 1997). The use of testimony as an interview technique helped women who witnessed and/or experienced violence to alleviate their pain in remembering the events (Agger 1992). The feminist oral narratives enabled us to examine the Kurdish- and Spanish-speaking communities as a whole while locating the individual woman within her community.

Our data revealed several factors that limited the women's learning. These delimiters included: the lack of connection between the content of learning and the social and political consciousness of the women; their lack of personal or active involvement in their legal experiences; the impact of trauma on learning; and finally, the traditional model of legal services that does not emphasize client learning. We suggest that, rather than seeing delimiters in a way that limits learning, they must be viewed as critical tools in framing an appropriate context. If the delimiters

of the learners are respected, then greater learning will occur in the long run. If learners have a positive, but limited learning experience, they will be more likely to widen their vision to include the larger context at another instance. We realized the degree to which the impact of trauma can be seen as a delimiter; this, in particular, has not been previously recognized in public legal education (McDonald 2000). Trauma is a terrible impediment to learning; women cannot learn when they have been so horribly damaged by their experiences. Recognition of the limitations are necessary in ensuring a positive learning experience for those involved. However, it is equally important to consider the experience of violence as a new source of learning, its basis, a learning that can transform social, sexual and political relations of power.

Finally, we believe that the distinction between formal, non-formal, and informal learning is an important one, and allows us to better understand the dynamics of learning. We need, however, to be aware of the complex relations between these forms of learning; we need to know especially their social and historical contexts. It is no accident of history that formal education began to displace informal learning with the rise of industrial capitalism; there was then a much more complex division of labor in industry and agriculture which created highly specialized skills and jobs to an extent that informal learning was not able to transmit requisite skills. For example, considering our project, we know that the legal profession is extremely complex; its language is formidable even for the well educated. Few of us understand the full implications of a lease we sign with our landlord. Even in campuses, law libraries are separate, with their special collections and organization. The question is: How can anyone understand this complex system through informal learning? In other words, complex division of labor and overspecialization create conditions which demand formal learning. Understanding this relationship between learning and social and economic imperatives allows us to understand the policy implications of learning. This raises the issue of the role of the state and the market in the provision of training, the creation of skills, and the structuring of the job market, and the place of informal learning in this complex set of relations. Such policy implications must include recognition of the special needs and abilities of diasporic women who have been traumatized by experiences of violence either in their homeland or their new nation.

Collaborative Learning For Change

The research phase of the project, which focused on defining learning needs and strategies, was concluded after the first year. Upon its completion, we concluded that one effective way of continuing this research was through engaging organic researchers from among the community. Our goal was to create a natural and dynamic link between the researcher and the participants. This participatory process helped to break the isolation cycle women were experiencing, fostered their own leadership skills and thus enabled them to create their own networks in their communities. In consultation with participants, we planned a *Community Leadership Project* which aimed at building networks within the community.

The *Community Leadership Project* addresses our understandings of informal learning and organized institutional forms of education. Both the research process and the project development have emphasized the connections between learning and action. The focus on learning and action has allowed us to identify a learning process that lives between and/or outside the institutional/formal forms of learning. This learning process, while encompassing some elements of both informal and institutional forms of education, is directly related to an understanding of learning as developing consciousness; and developing it consciously in order to effect social change.

Our research indicates that neither informal/non-formal nor formal learning have as a necessary function of the learning process a commitment to social change.

The *Community Leadership Project* has been a collaborative process from its inception. At the same time, the Project uncovers important critical issues relating to a participatory research process. It highlights the importance of recognizing oppression, and power/privilege dynamics in different learning contexts. It also reveals the links between women's social locations, and the oppressive barriers which deny them access to the information they need in order to affect change in their family lives, in their workplaces and in their communities.

We have entitled the final outcome of the *Community Leadership Project* Collaborative Learning For Change. In this report our aim is to identify missing pieces, to provide clarifications where needed, and to produce a community-based resource for women who are interested in developing leadership skills in group facilitation, community building, and community action. In developing this learning/action tool for the community, we considered the following:

- To produce a useful community resource that does not duplicate those already available and widely used.
- To create a unifying structure to the materials provided to the participants in the project.
- To take an approach which looks at the big picture for an understanding of the impact of social location(s) on group dynamics and the content of the learning materials.
- To produce a community-based resource for women who are interested in developing skills in group facilitation, community building, and community action.
- To make a connection between the content of learning and the social political consciousness of women.

An Integrated Feminist Anti-Oppression Learning Framework[1]

How can we link social justice issues and the questions of race, gender, class and all other forms of marginalisation to the question of how women learn? As women we know that there is a connection between how well we learn and what is going on in our lives. It is within our lives that we try to organize opportunities for our learning, individually and collectively. Women juggle full-time or part-time jobs, paid/un-paid work with part-time or full-time training and academic courses, and all the responsibilities of parenting and caring in a climate of racism, poverty, and patriarchy. Learning in groups - for training, for support, self-help and a full range of other educational and learning possibilities - can offer us opportunities for collective, collaborative and cooperative community action.

The workshops outlined in this guide emphasize the connections between learning and action. Linking learning and action allows us to develop our consciousness of the actions required to bring about necessary change in our lives as women. This process builds on feminist-anti-racist-anti-capitalist consciousness, and acknowledges that women are located differently in society, in our workplaces, in our communities and in the world.

This Collaborative Learning For Change guide includes six workshops which offer women opportunities to think about:

- What is feminist research?
- How do we work in solidarity with different women in their communities?
- How do we develop ideas for collective decision-making?
- How do we decide what questions to ask, and what to do with the answers?
- What are the risks to women in the community?
- How do we ensure safety for women in the process?
- How do we include women into the group and the group process?
- How do we use research to build strategies for action?

Workshops

The workshops encourage women to gather their experiences collectively. Women's experiences provide the content for women's learning B about the causes of poverty, racism, patriarchy, and other forms of injustice.

Women are encouraged to think about action, or how best to make action plans. The workshops offer opportunities for women to understand community-based experience and strategising as an important aspect of women's resistance and struggle. The workshops also include different problem-solving approaches and ways to work constructively with group dynamics. In order for women to carry out action together their learning must address issues of privilege and oppression.

It is best that women arrange their chairs in a circle. This helps maximize interaction and cooperation. Each workshop session opens with a Check-in, and ends with a Closure. This gives women an opportunity to express how they are feeling before the session gets underway, and to close each session with an expression of how they are feeling at the end.

The Check-in is a go-around, whereby each woman briefly expresses her feelings, and/or any stresses she is dealing with that might distract her from full participation in the workshop. Everyone is given an opportunity for uninterrupted expression. The check-in is not the time for giving advice, critiquing what is expressed, or for other participants to address what is being said. The time allowed for check-in is usually 10-15 minutes, depending on the size of the group.

Some suggestions for check-in include:

- Everyone states verbally how they are feeling, or shares any stresses that might distract them or limit their participation.

- Women can use pantomime, gestures or body language to express how they are feeling. For example, a woman who is feeling tired can express this with a yawn, or a pantomime of sleeping; someone else might express that they are feeling anxious by wringing their hands; a woman who is feeling happy might smile, or do a thumbs up.

- Make a list of descriptive adjectives that express feelings, like happy, sad, etc. Write the list on flip chart paper and invite participants to choose a word, or words, that best express how they are feeling. They can add to the list if they wish. The list can include words like: amiable, angry, beautiful, bold, brave, cautious, creative, delighted, diligent, depressed,

eager, focused, etc.

- Place a waste basket in the middle of the circle of women. Give each participant a small piece of blank paper and ask everyone to write down something that is stressing them and that might distract them from full participation in the workshop session, something that they want to throw away for the time being. Before placing their papers in the waste basket, women can share what they have written if they want to.

Closure is done at the end of the workshop sessions. It is an opportunity for participants to state how they felt about the session, and/or to let others know how they are feeling generally. Did the workshop change how they were feeling at the beginning of the session? What, if anything, did they learn during the workshop that they did not know before? Closure is also an opportunity for women to express their appreciation for others in the group.

Brainstorming and Debriefing are useful tools for building group process. Brainstorming means everyone putting out what they think is relevant to the topic or question as the first step in building a discussion. Then, new information can be added. For example, if the topic is Understanding Commonality and Difference, as a first step everyone can brainstorm together and say what they think these concepts mean. Responses are recorded on flip chart. It's a collective experience, and it produces valuable information. New information can then be added, information which provides a consciousness-raising opportunity for women in the group.

Debriefing is best used just before Closure at the end of a workshop session. It gives women an opportunity to talk about any issues which have come up for them in the group, or during discussions and activities. Debriefing can include requests for clarification, or opportunities for women to express any concerns they might have about specific interactions which took place during the session. Debriefing can also be used at the beginning of the next session, just after Check-in. The facilitator(s) may feel that something was left over from the previous workshop session that was not dealt with and might impact the group's ability to proceed.

Session One
Women's Experiences Are the Basis of Learning

Check-In

Starting from Women's Experiences

Women stress the importance of learning from their experiences and sharing this information with other women. Women's experiences can form the foundation of women's learning. When we share our experiences regarding issues in our lives, we can deepen our understanding of those issues and the impact they have on us, both individually and as members of women's groups and communities. When we start from our experiences, and understand the contexts that shape them, we are better able to develop strategies for action.

Using a Feminist Framework

When we work in groups with women from different social backgrounds, issues of diversity and difference will arise. Although diversity and difference enhance the group process, it can also make group work more difficult. A feminist framework can support the work women want to do together by helping us understand our social locations as individual women in society. A feminist framework will also help us understand how issues affect us differently, and how these differences play out in a group setting. Different women are affected differently by race, class, disability, and other oppressions.

Using a feminist framework can provides a basis for activism. When we start with women's experiences, we gain information that increases our understanding of how structured social systems impact different women, we are better able to recognize women's commonalities and differences.

Understanding Commonality & Difference

What do we mean by Commonality and Difference?[2] When we speak of commonality we are speaking about the similarities in experiences we share because of our location in society with respect to our gender, race, class, age, ability and more. Commonality may refer to similar experiences such as male violence, poverty and health issues. Recognizing commonality as a collective experience allows us to see how we are connected to each other. Commonality allows us as a group with similar experiences to recognize the impact of structures and institutions on our lives.

When we speak about difference, we are recognizing that within our commonalities we often experience different social barriers based on race, class, age, disability, and other forms of oppressions. We acknowledge difference in order to understand that race, class, colonialism, white privilege, poverty and health issues produce particular experiences for women resulting in relative power, privilege and oppression. Difference is connected to commonality because it reveals the realities of women's lives as complex, intersecting and interconnected.

Warm-up Exercise
Asking Questions

Sometimes questions can cause discomfort and make women feel unsafe. For example, it is not always appropriate to ask someone where they came from, or how old they are, or whether or not they are married, or have children. Questions we may ask one another can be rooted in our cultural and class expectations, or arise from our sense of commonality among women. Because difference also plays out among us, we cannot assume that our questions are neutral. While questions can be an important way to facilitate group learning, we must keep in mind that questions can be intrusive.

It is a good idea to do a Warm-up Exercise in the first workshop session, as a way for women to introduce themselves to one another and to get to know a little about each other. Facilitators can ask women in group the following questions:

1. What would you like to know about each other?
2. What information would make you more comfortable in the group?

The group can brainstorm and record some responses to the two questions outlined above, on flip chart. This gives women in group an opportunity to decide if any questions they might want to ask are intrusive and should be taken off the list. Once the list of questions is accepted by everyone, women work in pairs. Each pair chooses questions from the list and takes turns asking each other the questions and listening to one another's answers. Then they prepare to introduce each other to the larger group and share one another's responses to the questions.

Building Group Agreements

Group agreements are a set of mutually-agreed upon guidelines created by and for group participants. Women in group need them to create safety in group; to clarify roles and expectations of facilitators and group members; to encourage power-sharing between facilitators and group members; to allow for participants to take control of group by promoting ownership, belonging, accountability and responsibility; to provide a safe space for constructive challenging, and giving and receiving critical feedback; and for dealing with issues that come up as a result of group dynamics.

Group agreements are never neutral. When dynamics of relative power and privilege play out in a group, group agreements can often reflect the needs of women who hold privilege in group, while denying the needs of women who are marginalized by the dynamics in group. The information provided in **A Feminist Framework** and **Understanding Commonality & Difference** can be used as guides for building the group's agreements.

Following are some examples of group agreements which incorporate a feminist framework and an understanding of commonality and difference:

- We will strive to receive constructive feedback in a non-defensive way, with the knowledge that it is an integral part of our work.
- We will challenge statements, remarks, and behaviours that support any system of oppression.
- We are all responsible for creating a safe environment.
- We will listen with the intention of understanding and appreciating all women in group.

Exercise

Develop some group agreements based on respect, trust and confidentiality. Use the information from **A Feminist Framework** and **Understanding Commonality and Difference** as resources. Also include any agreements dealing with the logistics of the group, for example, ensuring that women will come to group on time and will let others know if they expect to be late, or absent. Frame your group agreements in positive statements, like the examples cited above.

Facilitators can write the mutually agreed-upon group agreements on flip chart, which can be displayed at each session of group. They can then be referred to when needed.

Closure

Session Two
Facilitating Group Process

Check-In
Debriefing

Working with Group Dynamics

What are "dynamics" in group? Where do these dynamics come from?[3] When we come into a group, we bring with us everything we have learned, about ourselves and about one another. We bring our values, our beliefs, and attitudes. Our behaviour in group is an expression of these values, beliefs, and attitudes.

We live in a society where the playing field is not level. Some people have greater opportunities for advancement, for education, for shelter, good nutrition, good health and so on. We all come from different social, historical, political and economic experiences. These experiences place us differently in relation to power structures in society. Some of us have more relative power and privilege than others. For example, women with white skin in an organization will experience skin privilege because "whiteness" is considered the "norm" in our society.

Think about the different "norms" in our society. Each of us can have privilege in some areas of our lives, while finding ourselves in oppressive situations in other areas. For example, a woman with white skin who is poor has skin privilege, and is oppressed by poverty. Each of us has intersecting experiences of privilege and oppression.

Each of us contributes to the dynamics in a group. It is a good idea for us to ask ourselves:

How am I in a group?
Why am I in this group?
Am I helping to move the group process forward?

Exercise

Brainstorm what some of the dynamics might be that are creating the following situations. Suggestions are included for the first two situations. Use these as examples for completing the exercise:

1. The group is very diverse and communication between the women seems difficult.

Possible dynamics:

Women may be feeling uncomfortable because of differences among them; marginalized women may not feel safe; language may be an issue.

2. The facilitator has designed a workshop that requires reading several handouts.

Possible dynamics:

Some women in group may find reading difficult; literacy may be an issue in group; language may be an issue; visual disability may be an issue.

3. Some women in group become silent and do not participate in discussions.

4. There are two women in wheelchairs who are do not come into the circle of women.

Cooperative Problem-Solving Model[4]

Features of the Cooperative Problem-Solving Model (CPS):

- Encourages co-facilitation and power sharing between facilitators.
- Emphasizes structure.
- Works best with closed groups.
- Emphasizes empathy, affirmation, and appreciation.
- Stresses non-judgmental behaviors and attitudes. Emphasizes safety and confidentiality.
- Encourages openness.

Facilitation tools include:

- Contracts.
- Affirmations and appreciation.
- Check-in and closures.
- Small group exercises.
- Active listening.
- Giving and receiving constructive feedback
- Group agreements

The CPS process shows how social, economical and political factors lead to emotional issues and problems for women. It offers a formula for problem-solving:

Oppression + Lies + Isolation = Alienation

Oppression means the issues and problems related to society's inequality which impacts on women's lives. These can include abuse, racism, violence and poverty.

Lies means the information or messages that tell women they are poor because they are lazy and don't work hard enough, or are abused because they are not good wives.

Isolation means that women feel disconnected from friends and community. They start to blame themselves for their situation.

Alienation means a sense of hopelessness and helplessness that may lead to substance abuse and other self-destructive behaviors.

From this understanding, women can move to actions that support their taking control of their lives:

Contact + Awareness + Action = Empowerment

Contact means that the group can give women an opportunity to make contact with other women who share similar issues and to get support.

Awareness means getting information that explains oppression and understanding the need for action.

Action means taking a step towards achieving desired changes in our lives, our workplaces, our communities, and the world. The action does not need to be a big move, but a definite step towards making desired changes.

Exercise with Scenario

> *Rosa is a 35 year old women who is an immigrant from Latin America. She came to Canada as a refugee. She can speak a little English and can understand a great deal of English. Her family is large. She and her partner have 5 children, and both her parents, as well as her sister's adult child, are living in Rosa's home. Rosa comes to the group frustrated with herself and says she never has any energy to devote to her family which she says makes her feel guilty and not like a "good mother.*

Questions (Work in small groups. Discuss the questions. Meet again in the large group and share your responses)

- How might you understand Rosa's problems using the CPS Process?
- How can women in the group work with Rosa and her situation to support her move from awareness to action?
- Can you think of a possible action plan for Rosa?

CPS Facilitation Tools are helpful in working with group dynamics:

- Active Listening. The steps to active listening are:

  Clarifying: To help you understand what the speaker is saying; to get more information.
  Restating: To show you are listening and understanding what is being said; to check your interpretation of what you have heard to make sure you understand correctly.
  Reflecting: To show that you understand how the speaker feels.
  Validating: To acknowledge the worthiness of the speaker.

- Giving and Receiving Critical Feedback: Constructive and critical feedback is a tool for good communication. It emphasizes:

  - Being clear with ourselves about what is motivating us to give the feedback; what are our intentions?
  - Being concrete
  - Describing our feelings and stating our wants.
  - Explaining our purpose in giving the feedback.

- Receiving constructive feedback emphasizes:

  - Recognizing that it is not easy for the other person to give us critical feedback; they are taking a risk.
  - Assist us in preventing and handling your defensiveness.

Exercise with Scenario

Using the Constructive Feedback tools, work through the following: Work in pairs; one of you will give constructive feedback; the other will receive it.

A co-worker is very supportive of your work-related concerns and knows that you plan to raise these concerns in a staff meeting. You understand that she will actively support you at the meeting. At the meeting, your co-worker lowers her head and does not participate at all in the discussion.

Guidelines for Facilitating in a Conflict Situation:

1. Assume that conflict will happen and that it can be part of the group's growth.
2. Consider what systemic inequality brings to the conflict situation.
3. Include a process for dealing with conflict in your group agreements.
4. Include an agreement in your group agreements about all group members taking responsibility for the impact of something they said or did that was oppressive, even if the intention was not to harm.
5. Use active listening and encourage participants to actively listen to each other.
6. Use the process for giving critical feedback.
7. Remember that each conflict is unique and complex and that there are no formulas or techniques that can be applied to every situation.

Exercise with Scenario

Work in small groups and discuss how you would facilitate the following conflict situations. Share your ideas in the large group. Use the Guidelines:

A woman in the group always checks in with "I'm fine", or "I'm ok" and nothing

more. She does not participate in group discussions. Some other women in group are beginning to complain about her lack of participation.

One group member tends to comment on anything that anyone else says in group. You notice that other women are becoming restless whenever she speaks.

Closure
Session Three
Learning Strategies

Check-In
Debriefing

Creating Effective Learning Opportunities
Exercise

1. Read the following quote together. In the large group, discuss what you think the woman means.

> Sometimes, learning the meaning of a word takes me to the distant past and all the horror of life during the war; then I forget the meaning of it again.
>
> (Quoted in McDonald, 2001, p.)

2. 2. Brainstorm some of the different situations and realities women experience that can put limits on their learning.

3. 3. After brainstorming, share experiences regarding limits to learning in your lives (some of these can include language, access to resources, lack of information, trauma and crises, and survival needs).

Exercise

1. In small groups, discuss the following questions. Document your discussion and prepare to present it to the large group:

- How do you want to learn?
- How do you learn best?
- What factors in your life can put limits on your learning?
- What are some concrete ways we can facilitate our learning?
- As women, we already have a lot of problem-solving know-how. How can we best build upon the knowledge women already have?

2. After the presentations, discuss in the large group some of the things you think women would

need to help create the best conditions for their learning. Record responses.

3. After the brainstorming, work in small groups and give examples of positive learning experiences you've had. Say why they were positive, and what the learning environment was like. Do the same with any negative learning experiences you might have had.

4. In the large group, share small group discussions and examples. Some of the positive conditions women need for their learning can include:

- A partly structured learning environment, with facilitation.
- An organizational context to learning.
- Appropriate educational methods.
- A supportive environment.
- Trust.
- Participation.
- Learning from experience.
- Addressing collective and individual needs.

Add any additional information to the list following your small and large group discussions about learning strategies and participants positive and negative learning experiences.

Closure

Session Four

Gender Bias in the Law

Check-In
Debriefing

Women need a lot of legal information about immigration and refugee status, family and criminal law, how to get protection from domestic violence, income support programs and more.

Exercise

Many women have identified that it is important to learn not only about the law, but also about how to challenge the gendered assumptions that underlie these laws. This knowledge B about the way law is gendered B is as important as concrete legal information. A law is gendered when

it affects women in a particular way which is oppressive. The legal system can maintain and promote male dominance, and can enforce women's vulnerability and oppression.

Brainstorm responses to the question: What does it mean when we say a law is gendered? Record all responses.

Exercise

Together, read the handout about the Canadian Immigration and Refugee Protection Act Sponsorship Program (Appendix I). Discuss what you think about what you've read. Then answer these questions.

- How does this law affect women?
- Who wrote this law?
- How does it reflect our day to day lives or does it work to disadvantage us?

Exercise

Using the Ah ha! Popular Education Tool to Look at Barriers to Learning

A law can seem beneficial to women when it does not account for systemic oppression. Factors such as race and ethnicity, income, language, age, bureaucracy, the traditional model of legal services that does not emphasize client learning, and the relative inaccessibility of information services all play a role in how well we are able to get the information we need in order to take action in our lives. In situations where women need legal information, the barriers to our accessing it can have devastating results.

Ah-ha! is a popular education tool which uses a picture, rather than words, to develop an analysis of a situation. It places the personal experiences in the context of structural and institutional oppression. It presents a picture of a common, rather than isolated experience. It places the individual's experience in a societal context. Sometimes, the Ah-ha! picture is called The Big Picture, or The Whole Picture. This approach encourages women to see their problems not as situations they must solve themselves but as experiences shared collectively. This helps break down feelings of isolation. It creates space for the inclusion of perspectives from different cultures and histories and honours these differences. It allows group to explore issues using pictures, rather than language, and helps free up the creativity in the group, equalizing space between women.

How to use the Ah-ha! tool

Using a large piece of paper, draw a picture that tells the story of barriers women face trying to access information about legal issues.

1. Assign a recorder. This is the person who will draw the picture. The picture can be done with symbols, stick figures, and/or cartoons

2. Create a dialogue that tells the story, moving back and forth between description and analysis. Talk about the specific experiences of barriers, and talk also about systems and structures in place that create these barriers. Move from the personal, to the collective.

3. Show the problem, and obstacles or barriers to solving the problem. Add an action plan. Make sure all the pieces in the picture are shown to be related.

3. Debriefing

Closure
Session Five
Funding

Check-In
Debriefing

Today, governments at all levels have cut their funding to social programs. Organizations are expected to look for alternative sources of funding, particularly from private donors. Fund raising has become an essential component in the development of any project.

Presently, most women's community-based organizations and programs have lost significant amounts of dollars. Many have had to shut down altogether. The prospects for this situation improving anytime soon are dim. We have to think strategically about funding, while at the same time developing proposals for soundly-based community programs. We need to ask ourselves:

- How can we develop programs that will support our action plans?
- What kinds of programs are more likely to qualify for funding?
- How can we strategies to find alternatives to government funding, while at the same time holding governments accountable to women by demanding that they fund necessary social services?

Exercise

Divide up into small groups of three or four women. One women in each group can volunteer to be the recorder, or this task can be rotated. Brainstorm ideas and suggestions regarding the following questions and record on flip chart;

1. How can we develop programs that will support our action plans?
2. What kinds of programs are more likely to qualify for funding?

Share small group discussions in the larger group. Organize the different ideas and suggestions into topics. For example, a topic might be the **Types of Programs Likely to Qualify for Government Funding in the Current Political Climate**. Another topic might be **Suggested Action Plans.**

Next, go back into the same small groups and discuss the following:

How can we strategise to find alternatives to government funding, while at the same time holding governments accountable to women by demanding that they fund social services?

Share small group ideas in the large group. First, discuss strategies for finding alternative sources of funding. Finally, share strategies for holding governments accountable.

Closure

Session Six
Outreach and Organizing

Check-In
Debriefing

This session provides both an opportunity for conducting collective discussion, and for planning further action and outreach. A review of the issues in the first session can serve as a jumping point for further planning.

A group of women who are interested in meeting for support and social activism can either review *Sessions One* through *Session Five*, in order to choose choosing particular topics, or go back through each session in turn.

Review the topics, issues and ideas presented and discussed in the different workshop sessions. In particular, review:

- The importance of starting from women's experiences
- Using a feminist framework
- Understanding commonality and difference
- Working with group dynamics
- Creating effective learning opportunities
- Gender bias in the law

Exercise

Break into small groups of three or four women and discuss specific ways that the information learned in the workshop sessions increased your awareness of how to:

- Work with issues of privilege and power in group.
- Ease conflict in group.
- Clarify issues.
- Increase knowledge and build information.
- Reflect and evaluate.

Report back to the large group and share your ideas. In the large group, decide together when and how you will outreach to other women who might be interested in joining the group, or setting up their own group based on the model used in Collaborative Learning for Change.

In your small groups, develop an action plan for outreach. Discuss the following:

- What are your goals and objectives?
- How will you apply a feminist framework to your outreach strategies?

Closure

APPENDIX I[5]

Canadian Immigration and Refugee Protection Act Sponsorship Program

The Canadian government claims that the Sponsorship Program, a section of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, is the centrepiece of the family re-unification program. Women can be sponsored by husbands, or fathers, or another legally designated male family member, thereby gaining entry to Canada.

The sponsor provides economic and structural support to the woman being sponsored, and she is dependent on him for her legitimacy in Canada. She risks deportation if the relationship breaks down. Often this relationship does break down, leaving women extremely vulnerable. Domestic violence often plays a role in the sponsorship relationship.

In 1999, a committee of the National Association of Women and the Law, wrote a report to Citizenship and Immigration Canada. It was a gender analysis of sections of the proposed Canadian Immigration Act. The report showed how the sponsorship relationship is an area where gender issues and the question of women and men's relations within the family B and their access to resources B is front and centre. It mentioned that sponsorship can make already existing unequal power dynamics in family relationships worse. Power imbalances combined with the stresses of migration, settlement, and underemployment can create the conditions for violence against women and for the exploitation of their labour, both inside and outside the home.

The report also pointed out that B even though Citizenship and Immigration Canada had recommended that the sponsorship relationship could, under conditions where a woman is exposed to violence, be reevaluated B the woman would have to wait for the reevaluation until the abuser was convicted.

The report demanded that the law had to have mechanisms in place that would suspend or end sponsorship obligations on the basis of any evidence of spousal violence B before a violent partner was charged or convicted. They suggested that the ultimate goal should be to do away with the sponsorship framework altogether (Ad Hoc Committee on Gender Analysis of the Immigration Act, March 1999).

WORKS CITED

Ad Hoc Committee on Gender Analysis of the Immigration Act, National Association of Women and the Law (1999). *Gender Analysis of Immigration and Refugee Protection: Legislation and Policy*. Submission to Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Agger, Inger (1992). *The Blue Room: Trauma and Testimony among Refugee Women: A Psycho-*

Social Exploration. London: Zed Books.

Aiken, Sharryn J (2001) Centre for Refugee Studies, York University, Toronto, Community Legal Education Ontario, Toronto.

Arnold, Rick, Bev Burke, Carl James, D'Arcy Martin, Barb Thomas (1991). *Educating for a Change*. Between the Lines and Doris Marshall Institute for Education and Action, Toronto.
Bain, Beverly and Naomi Binder Wall (1997 - 2001). *Facilitator Training Program.* Women's Counselling, Referral, and Education Centre (WCREC), Toronto.

Green-Powell, P. (1997). Methodological considerations in field research: Six case studies, in Vaz, K. M. (ed.), *Oral Narrative Research with Black Women.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, pp. 197-222.

McDonald, Susan (2000). Beyond Caselaw B Public Legal Education in Ontario Legal Clinics. *Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice*, 18: 3-59.

McDonald, Susan (2001). *Women's Voices Being Heard.* Adapted from S. McDonald, *The Right to Know: Women, Ethnicity, Violence and Learning about the Law*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis (2000) Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

Notes

1. The principles and application of the Integrated Feminist Anti-Oppression Framework are based on the work developed by Beverly Bain and Naomi Binder Wall, Facilitator Training Program, Women's Counselling, Referral and Education Centre (WCREC),1997-2001.

2. Developed by Beverly Bain (2001). *Facilitator Training Program*, Women's Counselling, Referral and Education Centre, (WCREC)
3. Ibid.
4. Notes on CPS is based on the *Facilitator Training Program* from Women's Counselling, Referral and Education Centre (WCREC).

5. For more information on sponsorship program and its impact on women see the Canadian Council of Refugees Web Site:www.web.net/~ccr.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

X	This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.
	This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").